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ABSTRACT

This booklet provides a basic introduction to the people, history, and cultures of Afghanistan. It is designed primarily for service providers and others assisting the Afghan refugees in their new communities in the United States. The 12 sections focus on: (1) "Preface"; (2) "Introduction" (recent Afghan refugees); (3) "The Land"; (4) "The Economy"; (5) "The People" (Pushtuns, Tajiks, Altaic groups, and other ethnic groups); (6) "History" (antiquity, early conquests, introduction of Islam, empires, beginnings of Afghanistan, western powers, formation of Afghanistan, modernization of Afghanistan, Soviet occupation, and current crisis); (7) "Religion" (the Sunni and the Shi's, the Taliban version of Islam, and Islam's impact on daily life); (8) "Daily Live and Values" (social structures, family life, key cultural and social values, festivities, food and drink, dress, and music and literature); (9) "Language and Literacy" (language roots, language use, features of Dari and Pashto, and names); (10) "Education"; (11) "Cross-Cultural and Adjustment Challenge" (physical health, mental health, educational concerns, learning English, women's issues, and capacity and community building); and (12) "Bibliography for Further Reading." (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education.) (SM)

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AFGHANS

The Afghans
Their History and Culture

Barbara Robson and Juliene Lipson
with Farid Younos and Mariam Mehdi

Culture Profile
2002

Published by the Center for Applied Linguistics
The Cultural Orientation Resource Center

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Preface

This booklet is a basic introduction to the people, history and cultures of Afghanistan. It is designed primarily for service providers and others assisting the Afghan refugees in their new communities in the United States.

The principal writers are Dr. Barbara Robson and Dr. Juliene G. Lipson. Dr. Robson is a linguist and writer with many years of experience teaching, working, and traveling in the Middle East and South Asia and in the field of refugee and immigrant education. She has written textbooks on the Pashto language spoken in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and designed and implemented ESL and native language literacy projects in refugee camps in Thailand. Dr. Lipson is a medical anthropologist and professor in the School of Nursing, University of California, San Francisco where she teaches community health and cross-cultural nursing. She is active in the Council on Nursing and Anthropology and the Council on Refugees and Immigrants of the American Anthropological Association and the Society for Applied Anthropology. She did most of her ethnographic research on the San Francisco Bay Area Afghan community between 1987 and 1997.

Farid Younos, Ph.D., made significant contributions to the sections on Daily Life and Cultural Challenges. Dr. Younos is an Afghan-American social scientist and Islamic scholar who immigrated to the U.S. in 1979. He earned his doctorate from the University of San Francisco in international and multicultural education. He is a lecturer, educational consultant, and author on social issues in the Afghan community.

Mariam Mehdi, director of the International Catholic Migration Commission's U.S. Refugee Resettlement and cultural orientation programs for Afghan refugees in Pakistan, provided an up-to-the minute field perspective on the constantly changing situation of Afghan refugees awaiting admission to the U.S., as well as socio-economic data and special attention to the most pressing needs of women and children. Ms. Mehdi has over twenty-five years development experience in South Asia, working for the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and U.N. Development Program (UNDP).

We would also like to thank our colleagues at CAL for their valuable contributions to the Educational Challenges section of this document. Miriam Burt, director of the National Center for ESL Literacy Education, has been involved with adult refugee education since 1975. Deborah J.

Short, director of CAL's Language Education and Academic Development division, conducts research projects on sheltered instruction and newcomer programs. She is also a teacher trainer and curriculum/materials developer.

Several people read and commented on drafts of the manuscript. In particular, we would like to thank: Razia Askaryar, PsyD candidate at the California School of Professional Psychology; Rona Popal, Executive Director of the Afghan Coalition in Fremont, California; Professor Shaista Wahab at the Arthur Paul Afghanistan Collection, University Library, University of Nebraska at Omaha; Kearn Schemm and Kelly Gauger, both Program Officer in the Admissions office at the State Department's Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration; the dedicated staff of the International Catholic Migration Commission in Pakistan; and Dora Johnson, Research Associate at the Center for Applied Linguistics.

We would also like to express our appreciation to Donald Ranard for his thorough and timely copyediting and proofreading assistance and to Vincent Sagart for his design expertise.

Finally, we would like to thank the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration of the U.S. Department of State, whose support made this culture profile possible.

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Introduction: Afghans in the United States

The Afghan population in the United States shares a common nationality and religion but is diverse in terms of political orientation, religious affiliation, ethnicity, social class, and attitude toward modernization. The importance of this diversity cannot be overstated. In terms of ethnicity alone, there are 19 different groups in Afghanistan, and, while the majority of Afghans in the United States are Pashtun and Tajik, there is an Uzbek minority in New York, as well as some Afghan Jews and Hindus, and Hazaras are scattered around the country.

From diverse backgrounds, Afghan refugees bring with them a long history and a rich, complex culture.

It is difficult to determine how many Afghans are in the United States. A conservative estimate, based on figures provided by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, is 60,000, but some knowledgeable Afghans state that the San Francisco Bay Area community alone includes 40,000 people of Afghan descent. Northern Virginia is the second largest community, with about 20,000 people. There are some 10,000 in the Los Angeles area, and there are other communities in New York, Georgia, Oregon, and Texas. The most active community is in the San Francisco Bay area; it supports eight mosques and many cultural organizations and businesses.

Before the 1979 Soviet invasion, most Afghans entering the United States were from Kabul and had been employed in government administration or education. After the Soviet invasion, Afghans became stranded here as students or sought asylum as diplomats. Between 1979 and 1989, the great majority of Afghans who came to the United States were resettled as refugees, and the majority of these were family members of Afghans who were already living in this country.

In the early 1980s, the first arrivals were members of the urban, highly educated elite. Many were wealthy. The family reunification program brought less affluent, less educated relatives. The majority was from Kabul and other cities and came through Pakistan and India. Many spent time in Europe, especially Germany, before coming to the United States. Relatively few came directly from refugee camps. A small group of Afghans came from rural areas where there was little opportunity for education or contact with Westerners. Many of these Afghans are nonliterate and maintain a traditional lifestyle.

Since 1989, when the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, factional fighting among warring mujahideen groups plagued Afghanistan, destroying cities and towns and forcing most professional Afghans to flee the country. In the 1980s and early 1990s, most refugees entering Pakistan

were ethnic Pashtuns who settled in largely Pashtun areas of northern Pakistan. During this time, most Afghan arrivals were admitted as family-sponsored immigrants. The United States admitted a small number of Afghan refugees, about 1,500 a year, until 1994, when admissions virtually ceased.

Recent Afghan Refugees

More than half of the recent Afghan refugees are Tajiks, and two thirds are "women-at-risk" cases, including children.

In 1996, after the Pashtun-dominated Taliban rose to power, ethnic minorities and opponents of the Taliban suffered persecution and fled to Pakistan. For many Afghan refugees, persecution continued in Pakistan, where they were threatened and in some cases killed. The Tajik-dominated government in northern Afghanistan collapsed in 1998, bringing social services to an end and putting unaccompanied women and children at great risk.

Since 1999, the United States has admitted those refugees who entered Pakistan after 1996 and who are considered to be in special need of protection by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). These UNHCR-referred cases can be divided into two categories: Those that include a male head of household in the family and those that are classified as "women-at-risk," or "WAR," cases.

In the first category are refugees who have been victims of state torture as the result of their political affiliation, race, religious beliefs, or membership in a particular group. Men outnumber women in these cases, and about half cite political persecution as the primary reason for their flight to Pakistan, while a quarter cite race. Of this category of refugees, more than half are Tajik. The majority are educated and speak Dari. The average age of the men is 42, and the average age of women is 32.

The second category, the WAR cases, represents nearly two-thirds of the 4,256 Afghan refugees who have been approved for resettlement since 1999. They are women who fled Afghanistan after the Taliban took over and who are considered by the UNHCR to be at special risk as a result of their gender and a dangerous combination of factors: the loss of a husband or male support, the highly repressive social strictures imposed on women and girls by the Taliban, and the lack of any means to support themselves and their children. Since 1999, nearly 2,800 Afghan WAR cases in Pakistan have been approved for U.S. resettlement.

The WAR category is largely made up of single women and widows with small children, but it also includes other groups: Married women who have been victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse; women and children who have been subjected to economic exploitation, such as virtual bonded labor, in exchange for food and shelter; and aged and ailing women with no means of support.

The great majority of the WAR cases have suffered human rights abuses. They have experienced physical and sexual abuse, the persecution and loss of family members, detention, forced marriage, harassment, destruction or loss of property, and landmine injuries. One quarter of the women and children are in need of medical attention for a variety of ailments, including stress-related high blood pressure, post-traumatic stress disorder, physical injury or disability, impaired hearing, vision loss, and a variety of cardiac, kidney, respiratory, and gastrointestinal problems.

Two-thirds of refugees approved for resettlement in the WAR category are children. During the early war years in Afghanistan, more than one-quarter of combatants were under 18, and toward the end of the war, children may have constituted nearly half of the combatants. Many WAR cases have had children forcibly inducted into the forces, causing great trauma to the children and their families.

The average age of among WAR cases is 35. The percentage of Tajiks (nearly 70%) among these cases is even higher than it is for other recent Afghan refugee groups. Most WAR cases are from urban areas, and more than half are from Kabul. Urban professionals make up more than half of the cases; of these, nearly a third are highly trained professionals (primarily doctors, engineers, and lawyers). The rest are mostly teachers, but there are also clerks, office administrators, skilled craftswomen, service workers (maids, beauticians, and cooks), technicians, academics, journalists, and artists. Among rural women, the majority are skilled workers in embroidery, carpet weaving, and agriculturally related occupations.

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In the last two years, certain trends are noticeable among the WAR caseload. In 2000, about one-third of the cases were widows, but by 2001 the number increased to more than half. It is also important to note a downward trend in the literacy rate among this group, from 90% to around 70%, as well as comparable declines in the number of educated and professional women. In contrast to earlier groups of WAR refugees, more recent cases belong to the middle and lower socioeconomic classes and are arriving in the United States with less education and fewer economic and social resources.

Like other Afghan refugees, WAR cases have spent an average of 4 years in refugee camps. Unlike other groups, however, only a small minority of WAR cases has relatives in the United States who can

provide initial resettlement assistance.

Whatever their backgrounds, Afghan refugees bring with them a long history and a rich, complex culture. This culture profile provides an overview of the land, the peoples, and the history of Afghanistan. It also gives information on the Afghan languages and cultures and discusses aspects of life in the United States that are likely to pose challenges for the newly arrived Afghan.

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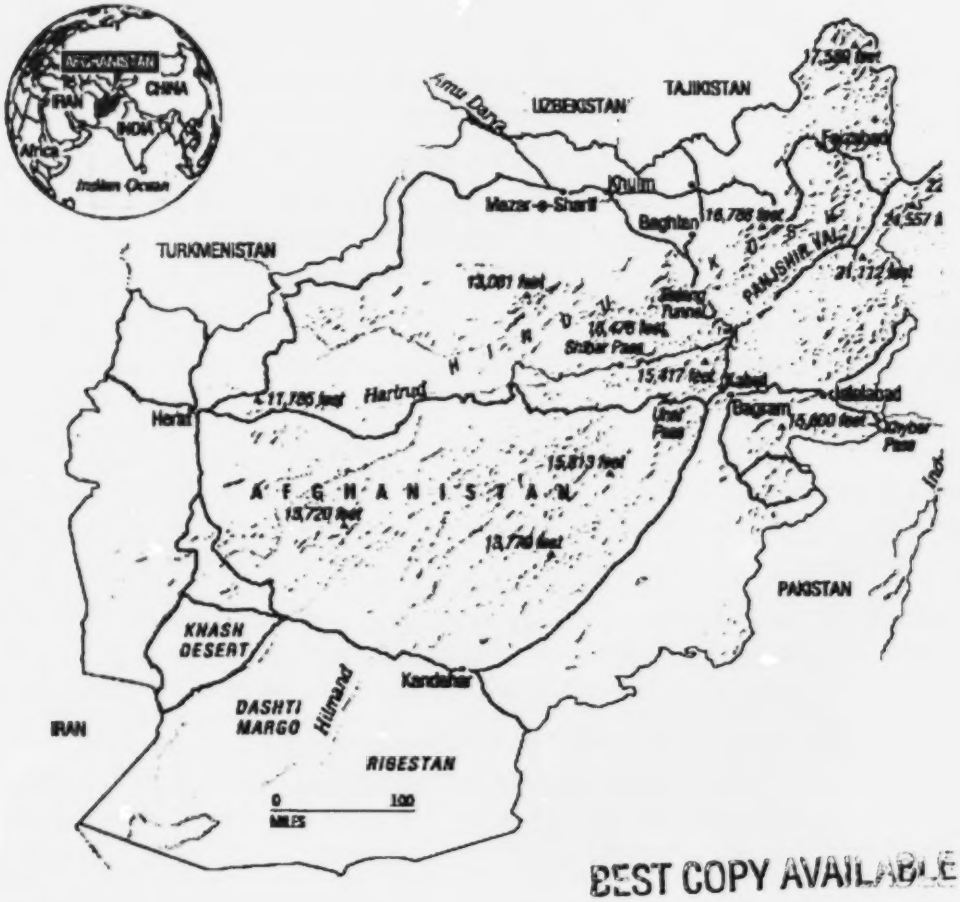
The Land

Mountains dominate Afghanistan.

Located in south-central Asia, Afghanistan is a high, landlocked country a little smaller than Texas. It is bordered on the west by Iran and on the east and south by Pakistan. Its northern neighbors are Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. China lies to the northeast. In terms of its mountain ruggedness and its climate of hot summers and bitterly cold winters, it is much like Wyoming. Temperatures vary according to altitude, but in general the average highs are above 90° F in the summers, and the winter lows drop well below freezing.



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As the map shows, the mountains of the Hindu Kush and the Pamir Knot dominate the country. The Hindu Kush runs roughly east to west through

the central part of Afghanistan, with peaks averaging 15,000 to 16,000 feet. The Pamir Knot is a range of high peaks in the Wakhan Corridor, the finger of territory extending from the northeast part of the country. Well over 80% of the Pamir Knot is over 10,000 feet in altitude, with peaks soaring to 24,000 feet. While there are a number of passes through the mountains, primarily the Hindu Kush, most are closed by snow in the winter, and only a few have paved roads. During the summers, the passes are navigable by heavy vehicles, but horses, mules, and camels are probably the most efficient means of transport. The Panjshir Valley runs through the Hindu Kush, north of Kabul.

To the west of the Hindu Kush, the land gradually slopes downward into sparsely inhabited, arid to semiarid rocky deserts, broken only by the river systems – the Amu Darya (Oxus), the Hari Rud, the Hilmand-Arghandab, and the Kabul. Most of the water in Afghanistan comes from these great river systems that carry the snowmelt from the mountains into the lower areas of the country, in yearly floods that frequently destroy crops and villages. It has long been recognized that the river systems have the capability to irrigate extensive drier areas through dams, water storage, and irrigation programs. Afghanistan does not suffer from a lack of water but rather from the inability to control and use the water it has.

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The Economy

Afghans are mostly small farmers and herdsmen.

Afghans are small farmers, growing wheat, barley, corn, and rice as major crops for internal consumption. Orchards are also highly prized and produce fruits and nuts for export. Opium cultivation also has a long tradition in Afghanistan. Opium has constituted the country's biggest cash crop and most successful export. Apparently yielding to Western pressure, the Taliban banned opium cultivation in 2000, but it remains to be seen whether the ban will hold under new administration.

There are some areas of Afghanistan that receive enough rain to dependably water the crops and to fill ditches, canals, and underground water systems. In these places, notably north of the Hindu Kush and east of Kabul, excellent crops can be grown. However, only about 12% of the land is arable. Over the last four years, drought in Afghanistan has destroyed agriculture even in these areas, partly accounting for the current desperate need for food. The major cultivation areas are also the areas of densest population, notably the Kabul-Jalalabad corridor, the Turkestan Plains across the north, the Arghandab valley around Kandahar, and pockets here and there around the major cities and towns.

Well over 40% of the land in Afghanistan is high pastureland. Accordingly, the country has a tradition of nomadism in which herds of sheep, goats, and occasionally cattle are taken up to high mountain pastures for extended periods of time. Today, however, there remain few true nomads – people with no permanent residence who migrate with their flocks. The typical herdsman is usually a small farmer as well, with a permanent home and village from which he takes his flocks to summer pasturage, leaving family members behind to care for the crops. The skins of the highly valued *qarakul* sheep of northern Afghanistan are one of the country's most profitable products, and wool is also an export commodity. Dairy cattle, used also as draft animals, are found in most parts of the country.

In towns, there are traders and tea houses, as well as fulltime craft specialists, such as potters, weavers, and shoemakers. However, few such centers exist in Afghanistan, which is still a land of small villages. Only the large cities, and particularly the capital, Kabul, have a modernized economic sector, although a very small number of factories and mining centers exist in other locations.

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SCROLL TO:

The Pashtuns

The Tajiks and Other Dari-Speaking Groups

The Altaic Groups

Other Ethnic Groups

The People

There has never been an accurate population census taken in Afghanistan, but the most common estimate is approximately 26 million. A staggering 5 million Afghans–one out of five people–are thought to be in refugee camps along the country's borders and in neighboring nations. Pakistan has given refuge to 3 million Afghan refugees.

Afghanistan has never been inhabited by only one ethnic group. The modern country's boundaries were determined by the interests of foreign powers, and on every side they cut arbitrarily through land traditionally occupied by one ethnic group or another. Its citizens naturally identify with those who speak their language and share their culture. Their loyalty is first to their local leaders and their tribe, and their identification with an abstract Afghan nation has always been fragile. In this sense, the country's multiethnicity has hampered its development as a nation.

However, while the different groups differ in language and culture, they also share fundamental qualities. One of the most striking qualities of the Afghan people is their toughness and resilience. Popular culture is based on tradition, steeped in religion and colored by tribal relics of war, romance and magic.

The map below shows the major ethnic groups that live in Afghanistan and indicates the extension of the groups into neighboring countries.

top

Pashtuns are the dominant ethnic group.

The Pashtuns

The *Pashtuns*, or *Pushtuns*, constitute an estimated 38% of the population of Afghanistan, and as such are the ethnic majority. Though their origin is unclear, their legends say that they are the descendants of Afghana, grandson of King Saul. Most scholars, however, believe that the Pashtuns probably arose from an intermingling of ancient and subsequent invaders. Pashtuns are Caucasians, of medium height, with strong, straight noses, black hair, and dark eyes, although there is a high incidence of blue, green, and gray eyes: The young girl with the unforgettable blue eyes featured in many *National Geographic* publications and posters is a Pashtun, or *Pashtana*, the feminine form. The language of the Pashtuns is *Pashto*, also spelled *Pushto*, *Pushtu*, *Pashtu*, and sometimes *Paxto*.

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When Westerners caution against optimism in battle against the Afghans, it is the Pashtuns they have in mind. The 'Afghans' that the British futilely battled against in the 19th century were the Pashtuns. The majority of the *mujaheddin* ('warriors in a holy war') who ultimately drove the Soviets out of Afghanistan were Pashtuns. Much of the civil war that followed the Soviet withdrawal was fought between rival Pashtun leaders, who had amassed weapons and followers during their fight against the Soviets. Pashtuns are fierce fighters and are known for their marksmanship. They are accustomed to hardship and poverty and can prevail in conditions that would easily defeat others. At the same time, though deeply dedicated to their religious beliefs, they also cultivate nonreligious cultural traditions. They are poets with a wonderful oral literature who can quote poetry by the hour.

The Pashtuns are Sunni Muslims, but their Islamic beliefs and behavior have often been tempered, and distorted, by cultural values that are sometimes at odds with the teachings of Islam, as in their treatment of women under Taliban rule. Distinctive tribal customs and traditions form an integral part of the Pashtun society. Pashtun cultural values are reflected in a code of ethics–called simply *Pashto* in Pashto, and *Pashtunwali* ('the way of the Pashtun') by non-Pashtuns–by which Pashtuns are required to live. Westerners are fascinated by the idea of the Pashtunwali, and Pashtuns correspondingly expand on the concept to suit their listeners.

Pashtunwali is followed religiously, and it includes the following practices: *badal* (the right of blood feuds or revenge), *nunawati* (the right of a fugitive to seek refuge and acceptance of his bona fide offer of peace), *melmastya* (hospitality and protection to every guest), *tureh* (bravery), *sabats* (steadfastness), *imamdari* (righteousness), *isteqamat* (persistence), *ghayrat* (defense of property and honor), and *mamus* (defense of one's female relatives).

These elements govern Pashtun interpersonal and intertribal relationships. It is expected that a Pashtun who has been wronged will exact revenge, no matter how long it takes. It is also expected that a Pashtun who has been wronged is entitled to compensation, that compensation being determined by a *loya jirga*, a council of respected men. And finally, it is expected that a Pashtun will protect and shelter the guests in his household. Another feature of traditional Pashtun life is that inheritances are traditionally divided equally among all the sons, in spite of the clear teachings in the Koran that women are to receive an equal share of inheritances.

The Pashtuns have traditionally been small farmers and seminomads, although their way of life and their rough tribal governmental system has been completely disrupted by the events of the last 20 years. More than 1 million Pashtun Afghans fled to refugee camps in Pakistan following the Soviet invasion.

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Dari is the name given to the dialects of Persian spoken in Afghanistan.

The Tajiks and Other Dari-Speaking Groups

The historical influence of Persia, now Iran, on the peoples of Afghanistan can be seen by the number of ethnic groups who speak *Dari*, the name given to the various dialects of Afghan Persian. The *Tajiks* are the largest and most influential of these groups.

Believed to be the original Persian population of Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, the Tajiks live in an area stretching from northern Afghanistan, across the border from Tajikistan, into the Hindu Kush. They often identify themselves by the particular valley they live in or near. The Afghan Tajiks are light-skinned Caucasians with aquiline noses and black hair. They share the Caucasian looks of the Iranian peoples, as well as their language. Tajiks constitute an estimated one-quarter of the population of Afghanistan. Half of the Afghans who have fled to Pakistan since 1979 are Tajiks, and approximately 65% of Afghan refugees in the United States belong to this group.

The Tajiks are 99% Muslim. Most are Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi sect, but there are a few Ismaili Shi'a Muslims living in the remote mountain areas. (A few Ismaili Shi'a Tajiks have been resettled in the United States). They are devout Muslims, strong in their faith. A proud, hard-working people, the Tajiks are known for their warmth and gracious hospitality, though recent events have made them more apprehensive toward outsiders.

A second Dari-speaking group, the *Hazaras*, are a Mongolian people thought to have arrived in Afghanistan in the 13th and 14th centuries. They have traditionally been nomads, moving their flocks of sheep, goats, and camels from pasture to pasture in the Pamir Knot and southward into the high pasturelands of the Hindu Kush. There are about 5 million Hazaras, making up about 19% of the country's population.

A third group, the *Farsiwan* (also called Parsiwan or Parsiban) are farmers who live near the Iranian border, although some have moved east to the larger towns of Herat, Kandahar, and Ghazni. The Farsiwan, who number about half a million, are ethnically and linguistically indistinguishable from the Iranians across the border.

Other Dari-speaking ethnic groups in Afghanistan include the *Qizilbash*, well-educated urban Afghans descended from the military and administrative personnel left behind by one of the *khans*, or rulers, who briefly conquered some of the Pashtun tribal areas in the 18th century; the *Aimaqs*, another Persianized central Asian group; and the *Moghols*, scattered through central and north Afghanistan.

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Descendents of Genghis Khan's armies live in the north of Afghanistan.

The Altaic Groups

In the 13th century, Genghis Khan cut a great swath across central Asia, through what are now the countries across the Amu Darya from Afghanistan–Kirghizstan, Tajikstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan–and westward into what is now Turkey. When Britain and Russia decided that the Amu Darya was to be the northern border between Afghanistan and Russia, the *Kirghiz*, *Tajiks*, *Uzbeks*, and *Turkmens* on the southern side of the river became Afghans. Except for the Tajiks, these peoples speak Altaic languages, which are very similar to Turkish and a completely different group of languages from the Iranian languages.

The Uzbeks are the largest of the Altaic groups. About 1 million Uzbeks live as sedentary farmers in northern Afghanistan across the Amu Darya from Uzbekistan. Most Uzbeks are Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi branch and have mingled many traditional beliefs with their Islamic practices. Although they are generally not orthodox Muslims, Islam is an integral part of their cultural identity. The Turkmens are a seminomadic people, and a few live in Afghanistan across the border from Turkmenistan. Finally, there are some Kirghiz living in the Pamir Knot, adjacent to Kirghizstan.

The Altaic peoples have contributed a great deal toAfghan culture. The Uzbeks are thought to have introduced the famous game of *buzkashi*, a kind of polo in which teams of horsemen try to capture the headless carcass of a calf or goat and carry it across a goal line. The Turkmens are known across the world as master rug weavers–the flag of new Turkmenistan includes an inset of typical Turkmen carpet design–and brought the rug weaving industry into Afghanistan. They also introduced the qarakul sheep, whose pelt is highly valued and constitutes a successful Afghan export.

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Other Ethnic Groups

There are a number of other ethnic groups living in small pockets in Afghanistan. Some of these are the *Beluchis*, who speak an Iranian language and live in the southwestern part of the country as well as in adjoining areas of Pakistan; the *Nuristanis* in east Afghanistan, a culturally and linguistically distinct people who are the descendents of the Afghan Kafirs (a group that resisted conversion to Islam until the 20th century); and the *Brahuis*, *Hindus*, and *Gujars*, who originated on the Indian subcontinent.

The table below summarizes information on the major ethnic groups.

Ethnic	% of Total	Native	Comments

Group	Population	Language	
Pashtuns	38%	Pashto (Iranian)	Also inhabit the Northwest Frontier Province
Tajiks	25%	Dari (Iranian)	Also inhabit Tajikistan; one of the original central Asian peoples
Hazara	19%	Dari (Iranian)	One of the original central Asian peoples
Uzbek	6%	Uzbek (Altaic)	Also inhabit Uzbekistan
Turkmen	12%	Turkmen (Altaic)	Also inhabit Turkmenistan
Aimaq		Dari (Iranian)	A central Asian people
Beluchi		Beluchi (Iranian)	Also inhabit northern Pakistan
Others		Variety	

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History

Antiquity

Until the beginning of the 19th century, Afghanistan's history was characterized by centuries of local resistance to various conquerors who marched through the area and by in-fighting among local leaders when there was no foreign power to oust. All these incursions have left their mark, either in archeological treasures or in cultural and religious influences.

Archaeologists have found evidence of human habitation in Afghanistan from as far back as 50,000 B.C. The artifacts indicate that the indigenous people were small farmers and herdsmen, as they are today, very probably grouped into tribes, with small local kingdoms rising and falling through the ages.

Early Conquests

Many routes of the Silk Road crossed the Afghan area.

The first of the conquerors who marched into Afghanistan was Darius the Great, who in 500 B.C. expanded the Zoroastrian Achaemenid Empire as far east as the Kabul-Jalabad-Peshawar area. The modern Afghan solar calendar shows the influence of Zoroastrianism in the names of the months, which are familiar to us in the shape of the astrological year. The Dari/Pashto words for the month starting March 2, for example, is 'ram,' and for the month starting April 21 is 'ox.'

Alexander the Great also marched through Afghanistan in 329 B.C., extending his own empire to the northernmost and easternmost parts. Alexander had to battle the local inhabitants for every bit of territory he gained control of. Afghanistan is "easy to march into, hard to march out of," he is said to have commented.

The next major incursion into the Afghan area was in the 1st century B.C. The Kushans, a confederation of central Asian nomadic tribes, took Afghanistan from the Greeks and held power over the area for several centuries. Around this time, the Western world established cultural and economic ties with China, and many of the routes of the Silk Road ultimately ran through the Afghan area: Several overland routes ran from north of the Pamir Knot through the valleys of the Hindu Kush then westward into Persia, and a route from India to China ran through the

Kabul area. The Silk Road carried Buddhism northward from India. One of the greatest cultural achievements of the Kushans was the carving in the third and fourth centuries A.D. of the world's largest Buddha figures –one of them 175 feet tall, the other 125 feet– in the sandstone cliffs close to present-day Bamiyan. (It was those statues that the Taliban blew up in 2001, amid much publicity, on the premise that as representations of the human form, they were offensive to Islam.) top

Introduction of Islam

Islam was introduced into Afghanistan in the seventh century.

Islam was first brought into Afghanistan in the seventh century A.D. by Muslim Arabs who were remarkably successful in carrying their religion and cultural influence abroad. Within 100 years of the prophet Mohammed's death in 632, they had established a new Muslim empire that reached as far as Spain in the west and to central Asia and India in the east. Even the well-established Persians fell under the Muslim Arab influence, although the Arab Empire borrowed much from the Persians, in the same way that the Roman Empire was influenced by the conquered Greeks. top

Various Empires

Genghis Khan marched through Afghanistan in 1220.

For the next several centuries, Afghanistan was under the power of one conqueror or another. Genghis Khan marched through Afghanistan in 1220, conquering (and destroying) as he went. After his death some local Afghan chiefs established independent principalities, while others remained under Mongol rule. This state of affairs continued until the end of the 14th century, when Tamerlane conquered a large part of the country and established Herat as his capital. Under Tamerlane's successors, the Timurids, the area prospered for the next century or so.

Early in the 16th century, Babur, a descendant of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, made Kabul the capital of an independent principality. Babur captured Kandahar in 1522 and in 1526 established the Moghul empire, which lasted until the middle of the 19th century and included all of eastern Afghanistan south of the Hindu Kush. During the next 200 years Afghanistan was parceled between the Moghuls of India and the Safavids of Persia. The Moghuls held Kabul and the regions north, up to the southern foothills of the Hindu Kush, while the Safavids controlled Herat and Farah. Kandahar was for many years in dispute. top

The Beginnings of Afghanistan as a Nation

The Durrani Empire was second in size to the Ottoman Empire.

In the meantime, native Afghan Pashtun tribes were beginning to gain power and exercise influence over increasing areas of the country. In the 18th century, one of these tribal confederations, the *Durrani*, was granted

authority over their homelands around present-day Kandahar. Their leader, Ahmad Shah Durrani, formed a Muslim empire in the late 18th century that was second only to the Turks' Ottoman Empire. After Ahmad Shah's death, the empire was beset by rebellions on the part of local tribal chiefs, causing Ahmad Shah's son Timur to move the capital from Kandahar to Kabul in 1776.

Ahmad Shah's grandson Zaman seized the throne after his father's death in 1793. Zaman was interested in reestablishing power in India, but the British, who were well established in India by this time, persuaded the shah of Persia to divert Zaman's attention from India by threatening the western side of his empire. The shah obliged by furnishing Mahmud, governor of Herat and a brother of Zaman, with the resources to take over Kandahar. Mahmud took Kandahar and proceeded to Kabul. Zaman hurried back to Afghanistan in 1800 and was handed over to Mahmud, who blinded and imprisoned his brother.

This kind of struggle for power–tribe against tribe, family against family, brother against brother–characterizes the intertribal relationships among the Afghans, and continued as their territory became crucial to the interests of greater powers, most notably the czarist Russians in the north and the British in the south.

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The 19th Century Russians and British fought over Afghanistan.

Western Powers and the Great Game

The influence of the British in the local struggles for power after Ahmad Shah's death marked the beginning of Western interest in the Afghan territory. The British had established a strong holding in India in the 18th century, as part of its imperialist drive. At the same time, czarist Russia was in great need of warm water ports, and one of the possibilities considered was through India to the Indian Ocean, a route that involved Afghanistan. The resulting tension between Russia and Britain is referred to by historians as the Great Game, and was characterized by a morass of political alliances and maneuvering among the Western nations and equally convoluted maneuverings among those nations and the local powers.

From Afghanistan's point of view, the most relevant result of the Great Game was the series of wars that the British fought against the Afghan Pashtuns in hopes of keeping the Russians at arm's length. These wars, which were unpopular in Britain and occasioned much controversy among the British troops fighting them, ultimately failed: The Pashtuns retained control over their areas. The first of the wars lasted from 1839 to 1842 and the second from 1878 to 1880.

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Afghanistan's modern boundaries were

The Formation of Afghanistan as a Nation

At the end of the second war, Abdurrahman Khan, a Durrani Pashtun and a

established by foreign powers.

fine soldier who had learned military strategy from a British mentor, declared himself *amir* of Kabul, and over the next 10 years engaged in a series of skirmishes with tribal leaders, gaining control over area after area until he controlled almost all of modern Afghanistan.

Hemmed in by the Russians in the north, the British in the south, and Persia (which was protected by the Russians and British alike), Abdurrahman concentrated on establishing a single kingdom. To do so, he had to break the power still held by local khans and tribes, and he accomplished this in part by forced movements of enemy Pashtuns to non-Pashtun areas north of the Hindu Kush, where their descendents still live. Another of his strategies that divided the tribes was the establishment of provincial governorships, the boundaries of which did not coincide with tribal boundaries.

It was during Abdurrahman's reign that the modern boundaries of Afghanistan were established. In 1891, after much saber-rattling, the Russians and the British, with Abdurrahman as observer, agreed that the Amu Darya would form the boundary between Russia and the Afghan territory, leaving the fertile agricultural area between the river and the mountains in Afghan control. They also decided to include the Wakhan Corridor in Afghan territory, as a buffer between Russia and British India.

In 1893, the Durand Line was drawn to establish the spheres of interest between Afghanistan and British India. The line was named for Sir Mortimer Durand, who used subsidies and subtle threats to persuade a reluctant Abdurrahman to agree to the boundary. While the Durand Line was not originally intended as a physical boundary between Afghanistan and India, it ultimately became that and now forms the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

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A series of cautious and moderate governments brought political stability.

The Modernization of Afghanistan

Abdurrahman set the stage for an Afghan monarchy that was characterized by an interest in Western technology and attempts at modernization. Abdurrahman died in 1901 and was succeeded without warfare–a first in Afghan history– by his son Habibullah. Habibullah kept Afghanistan neutral during World War I but was murdered in 1919. Habibullah's favored son and successor, Amanullah, declared his nation fully independent from the British, prompting the third of the Anglo-Afghan wars, a half-hearted skirmish that ended in a peace treaty that recognized Afghan independence in August 1919.

In 1921, the Afghans concluded a treaty of friendship with the new Bolshevik regime in the Soviet Union. Afghanistan thereby became one of the first nations to recognize the Soviet government, and a special relationship evolved between the two governments that lasted until December 1979, when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan.

Amanullah was open to European influence, and pushed for educational reform and the emancipation of women, proposals that infuriated the *mullahs*–Muslim religious leaders–and resulted in tribal revolts that led to the seizure of Kabul by the Tajik folk hero Bacha Saqqao and to Amanullah's abdication in 1929. Bacha Saqqao lasted nine months before he was overthrown by the Pashtun Mahammad Nadir Shah, who was declared king by the tribal army that had backed him.

Over the next 40 years, a series of cautious and moderate governments under the Afghan monarchy brought political stability to the country, and allowed it to make substantial strides toward modernization and national unity. Always, however, there was substantial resistance to any attempts at social change from the conservative religious elements of the society. While the monarchy was always Pashtun, it was the non-Pashtun, Dari-speaking Afghans who were more liberal, Western-looking influences in the country.

In 1931, the government drew up a constitution, an amalgamation of Turkish, Iranian, and French constitutions overlaid with aspects of the Hanafi *shari'a* (set of laws) of Sunni Islam. The constitution established a *loya jirga* ('large meeting,' or, in modern terms, parliament), a term used today in discussions of future governments in Afghanistan. The constitution left power in the hands of the monarchy, gave judiciary power to religious leaders, and created an economic framework that allowed free enterprise. A national economy developed in the 1930s under the leadership of several entrepreneurs who began small-scale industrial projects.

Nadir Shah was assassinated on Nov. 8, 1933, and the 19-year-old crown prince, Zahir, succeeded his father. The first 20 years of Zahir Shah's reign were characterized by cautious policies of national consolidation, an expansion of foreign relations, and internal development using Afghan funds alone. World War II brought about a slowdown in the development process. During the war, Afghanistan maintained its traditional neutrality.

Shah Mahmud, prime minister from 1946 to 1953, and head of the Liberal Parliament sanctioned free elections and a relatively free press. The country's conservatives and religious elements objected and supported the seizure of power in 1953 by Lieutenant General Mohammad Daud Khan, who became prime minister for the next 10 years.

In keeping with the agreement of 1921, Daud Khan turned to the Soviet Union for economic and military assistance. The Soviets ultimately became Afghanistan's major aid and trade partner, but shared the stage with the United States. The competition between the superpowers in aid of nonaligned Afghanistan benefited Afghanistan's infrastructure: Its roads and hydroelectric dam systems were in turn funded and directed by the Soviets and Americans. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Soviets also aided Afghanistan in developing ports on the Afghan side of the Amu Darya, opposite railheads on the Soviet side. Goods to and from Afghanistan were transported across the river by steamers and barges pulled by tugboats.

Among other reforms that Daud Khan successfully introduced was the inclusion of women in the labor force by allowing them to dispense with the veil if they wished and by abolishing the practice of secluding them from public view.

In 1964, the National Assembly approved a new constitution whose election policies (opening up a number of seats to direct election by the people) had the inadvertent effect of polarizing national politics. Daud Khan seized power in 1973 in a virtually bloodless coup. Leftist military officers and civil servants of the Banner party assisted in the overthrow. Daud Khan abolished the constitution of 1964 and established the Republic of Afghanistan, with himself as chairman of the Central Committee of the Republic and prime minister. The king Zahir Shah went into exile in Rome. top

The Soviets occupied Afghanistan to prevent their Afghan clients from being overthrown. A period of anarchy followed the withdrawal of the Soviets.

The Soviet Occupation

The Banner and the leftist Khalq ('Masses') parties joined to form the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan in 1977, and together they seized control of the government in 1978. But friction arose between the two factions, and by 1979 their Marxist reform programs had sparked major rebellions in the countryside. Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan in 1979 to prevent their Afghan clients from being overthrown, but in the war that followed, groups of Afghan mujaheddin were able to mount a successful guerrilla resistance. Millions of Afghan civilians fled into Pakistan and Iran to escape the destructive Soviet military campaigns against the insurgency. The guerrillas kept control of most of the countryside, and the Soviet troops held the cities and those areas near local garrisons.

The United States supported the Afghan rebels, pouring supplies and weapons into the country via Pakistan. U.S.-made Stingers, hand-held antiaircraft missiles, were a key factor in driving the Soviets out. Until the United States equipped the rebels with Stingers, they had been unable to counter air attacks.

The struggle against the Soviets, which was styled a *jihad*, or religious war, by the Afghan rebels, attracted conservative Muslims to the Afghan cause. One of those was the Saudi Arab Osama bin Laden, who went to Afghanistan in 1979 to join the Afghan resistance. While in Afghanistan, bin Laden founded the Maktab al-Khidimat (MAK), which recruited fighters from around the world and imported equipment to aid the Afghan resistance against the Soviet army.

After years of futile effort, the Soviet Union withdrew its 100,000 troops from Afghanistan from May 1988 to February 1989. Once the Soviets had left the country, the United States withdrew as well, leaving Afghanistan to its own devices. The civil war continued between the guerrilla soldiers and the government, which was still communist. In April 1992, several rebel factions succeeded in capturing Kabul, overthrowing the communist

government, and establishing a provisional Islamic republic headed by the Tajik northerner Bernahuddin Rabbani. Rival rebel groups fought among themselves, however, and the civil war continued.

A period of anarchy ensued, during which the government was powerless, and the rival groups seized anything of value in the country to pay and supply the troops with which they jockeyed for power. The economy was in a shambles, and the situation became so bad in the cities that it was dangerous to venture out into the streets, particularly for women. top

The Taliban gained popular support because of their ability to restore civil order after the chaos of preceding years.

The Current Crisis

The Taliban developed in religious schools in Pakistan. (*Talib* is the Arabic/Persian/Pashto word for 'student'; -an is the Dari/Pashto masculine plural.) They were mostly Pashtuns, young and poorly educated; many had lost their fathers and uncles in the struggle against the Soviets. They fought off rival mujaheddin and other warlords, and went on to take the city of Kandahar, beginning a successful campaign that ended with their capture of Kabul in September 1996. Their success was largely due to their popular support, gained as a result of their ability to restore civil order after the chaos of the preceding years.

The Taliban restored order by imposing extreme interpretations of Islamic law, with severe restrictions on the activities of women; measures were enforced with public floggings and stoning. Their extreme measures alienated most of the world. Only Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia recognized the Taliban government, while the rest of the world continued to recognize the Rabbani government, although by then it controlled little of the country.

In 1996, the Taliban extended safe haven to Osama bin Laden, who had returned to Saudi Arabia from Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal to work in the family construction business. (He had earlier been given refuge by Haji Qadeer of the Northern Alliance in 1994.) After being expelled from Saudi Arabia in 1991 because of his antigovernment activities, he moved to Sudan and was expelled from that country as well. From Afghanistan, bin Laden called for a jihad against the United States

Al Qaeda, the terrorist organization led by bin Laden, has been identified as the organization behind terrorist acts against the United States, the most recent being the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington, D.C. The United States demanded the surrender of Bin Laden for his part in 9/11, but the Taliban refused to give him up, claiming that Pashtunwali (specifically their concept of hospitality and the responsibility of a host to protect a guest) did not allow them to. In the recent conflict, the Taliban's fighting force was decimated by pro-American fighters and their rule ended. A provisional government has been established, and the country is tentatively beginning, once again, to rebuild. top

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Religion

Afghanistan is one of the most solidly Muslim countries in the world. The great majority of Afghans follow the mainstream branch of Islam, the Sunni tradition, although there is a Shi'a minority. Sunni Afghans are of the Hanafi school, the most liberal of the four schools of Sunni thought. For the most part, however, it is the folk level of Islam that is important in Afghanistan. The local religious leaders are not usually well instructed in Islam. They are mostly peasants who, in addition to their religious responsibilities, work part-time in other occupations, such as house builders.

The Five Pillars of Islam

Whether Sunni or Shi'a, all Muslims recognize five basic religious principles that must be observed in daily life. Often called the pillars of Islam, these principles are the *Shahadah* (profession of faith), the *Salat* (constancy in prayer), the *Zakat* (giving of alms), the *Sawn* (fasting), and the *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca).

Whether Sunni or Shi'a, all Muslims recognize the five basic religious principles that must be observed in every day life.

The Shahadah

A Muslim is required, at least once in his or her life, to affirm out loud and sincerely, "There is no god but God, and Mohammad is his prophet."

The Salat

The most important of the five pillars is that Muslims must pray five times a day, either in a congregation or alone, at sunrise, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and nighttime. Muslims may pray anywhere that is clean, and many devout Muslims carry prayer rugs with them to ensure a clean spot. Traditionally, the call to prayer was announced by *muezzins* who chanted from the minarets of mosques at the appointed times each day. Today, most of the calls to prayer are recorded and broadcast. Before praying, Muslims must wash at least their hands, face, and feet.

During prayers, Muslims must face Mecca. Each prayer begins in a standing posture, during which verses from the Koran are recited – in certain prayers aloud, in others silently. The standing prayer is followed by a genuflection and two prostrations in which the worshipper kneels and

touches his forehead to the floor.

On Fridays, the prayer just after noon is more elaborate, resembling more a Christian church service, with special prayers and a sermon that usually consists of a verse from the Koran in Arabic, followed by a discussion of that verse. The discussion can be moral, social, or political in nature.

The Zakat

Traditionally, the third pillar was an obligatory tax on food grains, cattle, and cash paid after one year's possession. Payment of *zakat* has evolved into a general requirement to help the poor and do other charitable acts, although some Muslim countries are seeking to reintroduce zakat as a tax.

The Sawn

The fourth pillar of faith is obligatory fasting during the month of *Ramazan* (the Afghan pronunciation of Ramadan), the ninth month of the Muslim lunar calendar. During Ramazan, a healthy adult must refrain from eating, drinking, and smoking from sunrise to sunset.

The Hajj

The final pillar is the pilgrimage to Mecca that every able-bodied Muslim must make once in a lifetime, assuming that the individual can afford it and can leave his or her family. After having made the pilgrimage, one gains the title *Haji*.

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The Sunni and the Shi'a

Afghans are mostly Hanafi Sunnis.

Islam is divided into two sects, the Sunni (or Sunnites) and the Shi'a (or Shi'ites). The split between the two occurred when an originally political movement claimed Ali, Mohammed's cousin and son-in-law and the fourth caliph, as Mohammed's legitimate successor. In time, this developed into a separate branch of Islam, the Shi'a, with theological, legal and devotional differences from the majority Sunni.

Sunnis constitute about 90% of the Muslims in the world. Iran is one of the few Islamic nations with a majority of Shi'a, Iraq being another. In other countries, including Afghanistan, there are pockets of Shi'a, many of whom have suffered discrimination and persecution for their beliefs. The Sunni-Shi'a split is frequently cited as the basis for political or military action. Shi'a Iran has expressed concern, for example, over the fate of the Shi'a groups in Taliban Afghanistan and consequently supported the anti-Taliban forces in the north.

The Sunnis are strictly orthodox in their obedience to the Koran and in the emphasis they place on following the deeds and utterances of the Prophet.

Sunnis follow one of the four legal schools: the Maliki, Shafi, Hanafi and Hanbali, which differ on the relative importance given to the consensus about the views expressed in the *hadith* – the sayings of the prophet Mohammed – and the freedom of interpretation given to judges. The Hanafi school of Sunnism, to which most Afghans belong, is the most tolerant school concerning interpretation of the hadith. Founded in Baghdad in the eighth century, it became the dominant Sunni legal school under the Ottomans, and is now the most widespread in the Islamic world.

A dispute over succession to leadership of the Shi'a in 765 separated the two principal branches of that movement – the Imami Shi'a, who are now the dominant religious group in Iran and northern Iraq, and the Ismaili Shi'a, found mostly in India and led by the Agha Khan. Both of these sects are represented in Afghanistan. The more unorthodox Shi'a believe that the *imam*, a Muslim leader, must be a descendant of Ali and that he has exclusive authority in secular and religious matters. There are subgroups of Shi'a who differ among themselves as to the true line of imams.

The branch of Islam followed In Afghanistan corresponds fairly closely to ethnic group.

Ethnic Group	Branch of Islam
Pashtun	Hanafi Sunni, except the Turi who are Shi'a
Tajik	Hanafi Sunni; some are Ismaili Shi'a
Farsiwan	Imami Shi'a
Qizilbash	Imami Shi'a
Hazara	Imami or Ismaili Shi'a; some are Sunni
Aimaq	Hanafi Sunni
Moghul	Hanafi Sunni
Uzbek	Hanafi Sunni
Turkmen	Hanafi Sunni
Kirghiz	Hanafi Sunni
Other Muslim groups	Hanafi Sunni

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The Taliban has been criticized for their lack of knowledge of Islamic law and history.

The Taliban Version of Islam

Even when fairly liberal governments were in power in Afghanistan, their advances were kept in check by the conservative, solidly Islamic elements of the society. The Taliban imposed a particularly fanatical, anachronistic and rigid variation of Islam on the country, to which the conservative groups were sympathetic. Generally speaking, the Tajiks and northern peoples have been more liberal, while the Pashtuns to the south have been conservative.

Many of the Taliban's current leaders were educated in the refugee camps in Pakistan, where they had gone after the Soviet invasion. Among the welfare and education services that Pakistan provided in the camps were *madrassahs*, or religious schools, which received additional funding and scholarships from Saudi Arabia. These religious schools have their basis in the *Deobandi* tradition that originated to counteract the Western influences in British India. In Afghan refugee camps, the schools were often funded and run by inexperienced and semiliterate mullahs. The schools also appear to be heavily influenced by *Wahhabism*, a very conservative Islamic tradition prevalent in Saudi Arabia. Wahhabism teaches that any practices acquired in Islam after about the 10th century are corrupt and must be eradicated. It is essentially a return to extreme simplicity of dress and personal habits, with various restrictions on women and the requirement that men wear beards. Islamic scholars have criticized the Taliban for their apparent lack of knowledge of Islamic law and history.

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The majority of Afghans adhere to Islamic principles of hygiene, modest behavior, and moral values.

Islam's Impact on Daily Life

The impact of Islam on individuals and families depends on the degree of adherence to traditional rituals. The majority of Afghans adhere to Islamic principles of hygiene, modest behavior, and moral values. Islam expects modest dress and behavior, including chastity until marriage for girls and women. Nonetheless, people vary in their practice of their religion. Some strictly adhere to tradition, praying five times a day, maintaining *halal* food practices, and dressing to cover head, arms and legs. Other are more relaxed, praying to themselves when the spirit moves them rather than at specific times, and dress less conservatively.

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Accommodating Islamic Customs

Service providers' understanding Islamic requirements can help make refugees feel secure in their new land.

As an American service provider, your understanding of and respect for Islamic requirements and customs can help make refugees feel comfortable and secure in their new land, especially if they are resettling without family sponsorship. Here are some specific things you can do:

- Read the Koran and a description of Islam written for Westerners to get an understanding of the religion and its followers.
- If you have set up an apartment or house for a refugee family, identify the direction to Mecca (East) and mark the appropriate wall in the living area.
- Locate shops where refugees can buy rice in bulk and where they can find meat that has been butchered according to Muslim custom. You might show shoppers how to identify ingredients on packages of prepared meats, (e.g., pork, bacon, and pork products), so that they don't accidentally buy pork products.
- Locate the nearest mosque in your area. In some areas, a local church allows Muslims to borrow its facilities for Muslim services.

Introduce yourself and the refugees to the person in charge.

- Be understanding if Afghan women want to cover their heads when going out in public. The dress code is of great importance to their cultural and religious identity. Years of social, religious, and cultural conditioning cannot be erased. In the workplace, the dress code should be accepted as long as the flowing chador is not a hazard to the wearer's safety.
- Be aware of the Muslim calendar, especially the month of Ramadan when all Muslims fast.
- Provide home orientation so that women can maintain their strict standards of cleanliness. They will be unfamiliar with American houses, and in the absence of help from other Afghans, they should be shown how to use a toilet and other basics of Western plumbing; how to use a washer and dryer; how to handle garbage; and the countless other hows and whys of an American household.
- Equip the bathroom with a vase or pitcher with a narrow neck and indicate it can be filled at the sink. Muslims are required to wash themselves after using the toilet–toilets in Islamic countries invariably have a source of clean water attached–and are uncomfortable with the notion of toilet paper.

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Daily Life and Values in Afghanistan and the United States

Social Structure

Tribal affiliation is still the most significant organizing principle.

Tribal affiliation is still the most significant organizing principle in parts of rural Afghan society. Tribal units have strong patrilineal organization – something that perhaps comes almost by nature to nomads and those with a remembered and idealized nomadic past. The patrilineal principle is also strongly supported by Islam. Leading families are recognized on the basis of land or livestock ownership, their reputation for religious leadership, or for having furnished men who exhibit the ideal Afghan personality type of the warrior-poet.

Afghans may operate at many different levels of group identification. The cultural pattern is one of competition between equivalent units but uniting with these competitors against outsiders. This begins at the level of competition between male first cousins and works its way up through lineages, subtribes, tribes, to ethnic group rivalries. The pattern allows nearly all Afghans to unite, at least at times, against outside threats, as was to great extent the case against the Soviet invasion.

Among the Pashtun, the *jirga*, an assembly of all the adult males, decides important matters by vote at village level or at the local division of a Pashtun tribe. (This pattern has also spread to a great many non-Pashtuns.) Larger units function by assemblies of local leaders. It has been a long-standing tenet of Afghan society that ultimate sovereignty rests in a national *loya jirga*, convoked of notables from the whole country, as with the assemblies that approved the constitutions of 1931, 1964, and 1977, and that which established the interim government in 2002.

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The Family

An Afghan's family is sacrosanct.

In rural areas of Afghanistan, traditional life centered on the kala, a walled compound within which lived the landowner and his extended family – parents, wife (or wives since Islam allows men up to four wives, though most male Afghans cannot afford more than one), young children, grown sons and their families, and unmarried female relatives. Wealthier families had facilities for guests in their kalas, and were equipped to shelter and entertain anyone who came by. Travelers were welcomed for the news they brought and the opportunity for fresh conversation.

Even in the cities, to a certain extent, people live in extended family units. The women of the households form a single work group and care for and discipline the children. The senior active male member, typically the grandfather, controls all expenditures, and the grandmother oversees all domestic work assignments.

Adults work very hard but also do extensive visiting or entertaining during weekends and sometimes on weekday nights as well. Women with small children may remain at home, and they are also very busy with household responsibilities and entertaining relatives and friends. Hospitality, one of the most important Afghan values, requires elaborate food preparation and a very clean house.

An Afghan's family is sacrosanct and a matter of great privacy. It is considered a breach of manners among liberal Afghans, and an act requiring revenge among conservatives, for a man to express interest of any sort in another man's female relatives. It is this cultural sense of privacy that probably was reinterpreted by the Taliban into an insistence that women be covered from head to foot when in public: A woman belongs to her family and should not be available, in any sense, to outsiders.

In the United States, family life is still the core of Afghan culture and psychological well-being, even though Afghan culture in the United States is in transition, with families ranging from traditional to cosmopolitan, based on their background and personal choice. Afghans tend to socialize almost exclusively with extended family members, and this intense family focus can cause culture conflict in the United States. Extended family obligations, especially to parents and older siblings, often supersede other responsibilities, including allegiance to one's spouse, one's job, and certainly to one's own needs.

Afghan traditional views on what constitutes proper family relationships are often at odds with American values and can lead to difficulties with the legal and social service systems. For example, polygyny is commonplace in Afghanistan, as long as the husband is able to support each wife equally. Polygamy is a crime in the United States, and U.S. INS restrictions, which recognize American mainstream cultural values, have caused the disruption of Afghan families.

In most Afghan American families, traditional role relationships have been disturbed. Although traditional Islamic cultures view the woman's proper place as in the home, many Afghan women must work outside the home to contribute to the family income. Afghan women have adapted to the United States better than have men, who have had difficulty finding a middle road between a traditional and an American lifestyle. Husbands whose wives earn salaries and have economic freedom suffer a loss of paternal leadership as the family's sole breadwinner. The traditional husband's power and role as head of the family is further damaged when children learn English more quickly than the parents do and become their parents' translators and spokespersons.

While Afghan communities in the United States have made tremendous concessions to Western life, there is often tension in families as the children bring their school-learned American sensibilities into homes with traditional Afghan values. Schools teach children independence and assertiveness, which contradict cultural values of family interdependence and strict obedience to elder family members, particularly to the father's authority. Families are concerned that children will pick up immodest behavior from their non-Muslim classmates, as well as from school itself, as in sex education, being served pork, and teen drinking. However, because young Afghan Americans must walk a very narrow line, most of them learn to do so with grace and are a great credit to their families. Even young people who appear to be completely American in their speech and activities still maintain an Islamic outlook.

Children are expected to work hard in school and to come home after school to do homework; strict parents do not allow their children to engage in after-school activities. Some children and teens resort to truancy to spend time with their friends when parents do not allow them to go out with friends or visit them at their homes. Boys, however, have much more freedom than girls do. Teenage boys commonly rebel against their parents up until high school when they begin to assume young adult responsibilities.

Dating is a perpetual issue in Afghan families, and current American sexual mores (that permit, for example, unmarried couples to live together) are a source of dismay. In Afghanistan, families arrange marriages, although there is a great deal of variation in how much input the principals are allowed to have. In rural areas, the groom frequently does not see the bride until the two are engaged or even until they are married. In the United States, most young adults meet each other through school or work. Some

secretly date to get to know each other before deciding to get married. They normally become engaged, however, only after the parents have approved of the match. Some wait to marry until they have finished college, but most marry by their early 20s. Divorce is rare but becoming more common with acculturation.

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Key Cultural and Social Values

"In Afghanistan, life doesn't belong to just one person."

A key difference between Afghan and mainstream American cultures is that the latter stresses the independence of the individual while the former emphasizes the individual's dependence on the family. "In Afghanistan, life doesn't belong to just one person," an Afghan commented. "Every decision is connected to the family – we are all tied together."

At the same time, Afghans are some of the most independent people in the world, disliking others, especially outsiders, telling them what to do. Indeed, one cause of the 1978-1979 uprising against Afghanistan's Marxist government was its attempts to interfere in the domestic sphere. In the United States, Afghans perceive school and social service agency intervention as undermining parental authority, responsibility and control, even demeaning marriage, the purpose of which is to bear and raise children: "What right do strangers have to intrude in our family and judge our discipline?" one Afghan refugee asked. "Our children are our responsibility." Some parents are so frightened by stories of children being taken away that they are afraid to discipline their children.

Afghans see family matters as strictly private. People are generally reluctant to share personal and family issues with nonfamily members, including health care professionals, though women may discuss their problems with friends, including non-Afghans.

While Afghans appreciate American freedoms and opportunities, they reject many aspects of the American way of life. In particular, they are shocked by what they see as the lack of hospitality and proper courtesy toward guests; in Afghanistan, for a child not to greet a guest would be a serious breach of manners.

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Festivities

Afghans celebrate the first day of spring with picnics.

Afghan social occasions are predominantly family and extended family affairs. Picnics are important events on Fridays, the official government and religious holiday for Afghans. Many parties are for either male or female groups, and in rural areas of Afghanistan, if both sexes are invited, they often participate separately.

The most festive holiday celebrated by Afghans, and Iranians, is *Nawroz*, the new year celebration, which occurs on March 21, the vernal equinox. Literally meaning 'new day,' Nawroz is celebrated with picnics, similar to our cookouts. The festival has its roots in *Zoroastrianism*, a religion brought from Persia long before the rise of Islam. During the celebrations, lavish meals are prepared. Two dishes, *samanak* and *haft-mehwah* are specially cooked for the occasion. Samanak is a dessert made of wheat and sugar that can take two days to prepare. *Haft-mehwah* consists of seven fruits and nuts that symbolize the coming of spring.

As Muslims, Afghans celebrate Muslim holidays. The two most important holidays are *'Eid al Fitr* and *'Eid-al-Qurban*. 'Eid al Fitr marks the end of *Ramazan*, the month of ritual fasting associated with the lunar calendar. These holidays occur eleven or twelve days earlier each year, according to the Arabic lunar calendar, which is eleven or twelve days shorter than our solar calendar. Muslim communities in the United States celebrate these holidays in various ways, and Afghan refugees have no trouble in managing satisfactory celebrations.

'Eid-e-Qurban, also known as *'Eid-al-Adha*, marks the preparation for hajj, which takes place during the 12^{th} month of the Muslim calendar, between the 7^{th} and 10^{th} days. 'Eid-e-Qurban is celebrated on the 10^{th} day and centers on the ritual slaughter of a sheep or goat to commemorate Abraham's sacrificial slaying of a sheep instead of his son Isaac. One-third of the slaughtered animal is used by the family, another third by relatives, and the rest is given to the poor. Friends also exchange presents during this time.

Afghan weddings are wonderful social events that can go on for days. The wedding festivities typically start with a religious ceremony at which a mullah reads parts of the Koran, and the couple exchanges vows (known as the *Neka*). Only the bride and groom and a few close family members will attend this ceremony. The next part of the wedding is similar to a Western wedding reception in the United States. Whereas in Afghanistan, each

family might host a party, in the United States, it has become common for the groom's family to host the reception. Consuming months of planning and large budgets, the reception is often held in a banquet facility for up to 500 guests and lasts from evening well into the early hours of the morning.

Traditionally, the guests first gather without the bride and groom; in conservative areas, the men and women are entertained separately, while in more liberal circles, the guests mix. There is music, dancing, and a dinner as lavish as circumstances can afford. After everyone has finished eating, the bride and groom proceed into the reception, during a special song, the *Asta Burrow*, meaning 'go slowly.' All the guests stand and applaud the couple as they proceed to a couch on a raised platform. They are showered with candy or flowers as they reach the platform, and from there they carry out various wedding traditions, such as exchanging rings and cutting and exchanging cake. After the reception, the bride and groom are taken to the groom's home, accompanied by some of the guests. There breakfast is served, and the couple is finally left alone.

The birth of a first child is the occasion for a daylong celebration, which is more elaborate if the child is a boy. Subsequent births receive less attention. The sixth night after a birth there is an open house celebration for friends, who bring small gifts.

Boys are usually circumcised about the age of 7, after which they begin wearing turbans. The circumcision is the occasion for a feast, likely to involve wrestling contests and other demonstrations of manliness.

Although funerals are hardly festivities, commemorative meals may take place several times in the year following a death. Large-scale food distributions connected with funerals were made illegal in Afghanistan in 1950.

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Food and Drink

Afghan food centers on rice dishes called "pilaus."

Afghan food is essentially a variety of Persian food, with influences from the non-Iranian ethnic groups. It centers on *pilaus*, kabobs, *chalows*, and dumpling-like dishes introduced by the Altaic peoples from the north. A pilau is a rice dish in which the rice has been cooked with other ingredients and is therefore colored and flavored by those ingredients. The rice is usually cooked with meat juices, but sometimes only vegetables are used. Probably the most famous Afghan pilau is *qabile pilau*. There are probably as many variations of this dish as there are villages in Afghanistan, but typically pieces of lamb are covered with a pilau that includes strips of carrots and currants. Another quintessential Afghan dish is *aushak*, scallion-filled dumplings with meat sauce and yogurt, sprinkled with mint.

An Afghan American community of any size is almost certain to have a kabob shop, a fixture in Afghan cities and towns. The Afghan equivalent to fast food, kabobs are of lamb, mutton, or beef (or, in the United States, chicken) and can consist of chunks of meat skewered and roasted or ground beef formed around the skewer. A kabob shop will feature several kinds of kabobs, along with bread and possibly vegetables or salad to accompany the kabob.

Afghan bread comes in slabs, or in round flat loaves (not to be confused with the now commonly sold Middle Eastern pita bread) that have been baked on the inner sides of large clay ovens called *tandoors*. Afghan bread is generally available in Middle Eastern grocery stores and in mainstream grocery stores in cities with large Afghan populations.

Because of cattle and sheep herding, dairy products are traditionally an important part of the diet. Cheese, buttermilk, and yogurt are widely used. Curd is also thoroughly drained and then dried in small hard balls for future use in cooking. Boiled curd is often eaten for breakfast. Fresh vegetables and fruit, when available, are also an important part of the diet. In rural Afghanistan, regular midday meals are not eaten, but people carry around nuts and dried fruit for energy throughout the day.

The usual beverage is tea, which constitutes one of Afghanistan's major imports. In general, black tea is used southeast of the Hindu Kush mountains, while green tea is preferred in the northwestern part of the country. Although most Afghans, as Muslims, do not drink alcohol, some educated, urban Afghans frequently do. Muslim dietary rules also prevent most Afghans from eating pork.

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Dress

In the United States, Afghans usually adopt Western clothing styles.

Afghan women typically wear a two-piece outfit consisting of loose trousers worn under a tunic with a high neck and long sleeves, fitted loosely at the waist and extending below the knees, with the straight skirt slit up both sides for ease of movement. Many women complete the outfit with a long scarf that covers the head when modesty is required, but is at other times gracefully draped across the shoulders, called the *hijab*. Some women wear a *chador*, a garment that completely covers the head, shoulders, and face except for the eyes.

The *burkha* or *burqa* that the Taliban required women to wear in public is a tent-like garment that covers the woman from head to foot. The part covering the head is tight, to keep in place a mesh panel, out of which the woman sees; the rest is voluminous, gathered in back in pleats that allow freedom of movement. The woman maneuvers the garment with her hands, so that the mesh panel stays in front of her eyes. When modesty is not needed, the whole front part of the burkha can be tossed over the head.

Afghan men also wear a long tunic over baggy trousers and often wear a vest over the tunic. Turbans, traditionally white but now of any color, are wound around the locally favored type of turban caps. Pashtuns and others who imitate them leave a couple of feet of turban cloth hanging down, while most of those in the rest of the country tuck the end in. Pashtun men customarily have their hair cut square at ear-lobe length. Other groups have their heads shaved about once a month.

In cold weather, men frequently wear a blanket over their shoulders. In winter, both men and women wear sweaters, jackets, and coats. Coats worn in rural areas are often brightly striped and quilted for warmth. Shirts, vests, and coats may be embroidered, particularly those for wear on special occasions.

In the United States, Afghans usually adopt Western clothing styles, although in the summer they might wear their native dress, as it is better adapted to hot weather than Western clothes are. Women are comfortable in slacks and tunic-like tops and sweaters.

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Music and Literature

Dari literature has a 1,000-year tradition of rhymed poetry.

Afghan music, once banned by the Taliban but readily available on tape in Afghan communities in the United States, is very popular. Both sexes dance the *atan*, a national dance in which dancers with arms raised twist from side to side at the waist as they step in a slow, rhythmic pattern around a circle. It is danced in same-sex groups during weddings and other celebrations.

Dari literature is Persian literature, a 1000-year tradition mostly of rhymed poetry. The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam is probably the best-known example of Persian poetry, through the translation of Edward Fitzgerald. A *rubai* is a quatrain with a particular meter; *rubaiyat* is the plural of *rubai*.

Pashto also has a literary tradition, dating from the writings of Khoshal Khan Khattak, a larger-than-life Pashtun soldier and poet whose writings are full of life and energy. Pashto poetry mimics Persian poetry, with similar verse forms.

Pashto also has a thriving oral literature, a major feature of which is the *landay*, a two-line poem with nine syllables in the first line and thirteen syllables in the second. The lines do not rhyme, but in the more elegant examples there is internal rhyming. The second line always ends in the syllable [na] or [ma]. Landays are created by both sexes, and range from poetic expressions of beauty:

> *God's grace lies there in the high mountains.*
>
> *At their summit there is snow; at their feet flowers.*

to comments about everyday life (unrequited love is a frequent topic):

> *There's the sound of crying from upstairs.*
>
> *Someone is sick, or a lover is going away.*

There are emerging modern traditions in both Dari and Pashto that include short stories, novels, drama, and poetry outside the traditional rhyme and meter structures. Modern Pashto short stories are particularly illustrative of traditional Pashtun values and show a culture far different from what one would expect from the information available about the Taliban. One such story, written by the respected Pashtun writer Ulfat, tells of a man who

unknowingly shelters a guest who has murdered the man's son. The man hears the circumstances of the murder, recognizes that his son was at fault, and publicly acknowledges his son's culpability and forgives the murderer.

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Language and Literacy

Language Roots

The two major languages in Afghanistan are Pashto and Persian, known in Afghanistan as Dari. Both are Iranian languages. The fact that they are related is obvious even to the casual observer, although the historical connection is not very close. Persian is the principal West Iranian language and Pashto the principal East Iranian language. They may have first begun to split apart several centuries B.C. The Iranian languages form one branch of the Indo-European language family that includes the Romance languages such as French and Spanish and the Germanic languages such as German and English. Pashto and Dari are, therefore, distantly related to English.

Uzbek and Turkmen, spoken by minorities in the northern areas of Afghanistan, are both Altaic languages, closely related to Turkish and the languages of the Central Asian republics that were formerly Soviet Socialist Republics. Thanks to trade links with the subcontinent, a good number of Afghans, especially from the southern part of the country, also speak and understand Urdu and Punjabi.

Dari and Pashto are distantly related to English.

The similarities and differences among the languages–even the very distant relationship between English and Dari/Pashto–can be seen by comparing the numbers one through five.* The Dari and Pashto numbers are clearly related but bear no relationship whatever to the Uzbek or Arabic numbers.

English	Dari	Pashto	Uzbek	Arabic
one	[yak]	[yaw]	bir	[wahad]
two	[du]	[dwa]	ikki	[ithneyn]
three	[se]	[dre]	ooch	[thalatha]
four	[char]	[tsalor]	tort	[arba'a]
five	[panj]	[pindzuh]	besh	[khamsa]

Although the languages in Afghanistan are written using adaptations of the Arabic alphabet, none is related to Arabic, which is a member of the Semitic language family, along with Hebrew, and completely different from either the Indo-European or the Altaic language families.

* The Dari, Pashto, and Arabic words are given in phonetic notation, signified by enclosure in brackets. The Uzbek numbers are transliterated from the Cyrillic alphabet.

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Language Use

Dari is the prestige language and lingua franca in Afghanistan.

Dari has always been the prestige language in Afghanistan. It is the lingua franca, the language resorted to when speakers of different languages need to conduct business or otherwise communicate. However, there are different pressures favoring the use of either Dari or Farsi.

Pashto was designated a national language of Afghanistan by the Pashtuns in the various constitutions, and in the period of modernization, all non-Pashto-speaking government workers were required to learn the language. It was by no means a popular activity: those who took such Pashto classes allege that the Pashtun teachers made the language more difficult than it needed to be. Pashto was also required as a subject in elementary schools where the medium of instruction was Dari. The language served as a national symbol since it is primarily a language associated with Afghanistan, though around half its speakers live in Pakistan. Even so, Pashto has never had the status of Dari, which has a vast cultural and literary tradition.

Dari speakers are more diverse, counting Tajiks, Hazara, Farsiwan, and Aimaq among their numbers. In Afghanistan, all education above primary school is conducted in Dari, except specific Pashto language study. Pashto speakers are frequently bilingual in Dari, but Dari speakers rarely learn more than a few words of Pashto. Speakers of other languages in Afghanistan frequently pick up Dari as a matter of course, except in the totally Pashtun areas of the south. Both Dari and Pashto are spoken among Afghans in the United States, although Dari has been more prevalent in recent years.

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Features of Dari and Pashto

Both Dari and Pashto are Iranian languages.

As mentioned above, while Dari and Pashto are different languages, they share common roots in the Iranian family of languages. As such, they share common letters and some words, and their word order and verb systems are similar. They are both written using the Arabic alphabet.

Sound Systems

Dari has a set of consonants quite similar to those of English. There are short and long vowels, and stress is on the last syllable of the word. Pashto has seven vowels, and generally the same consonants as Dari does, but in addition has a series of retroflex consonants: *t*, *d*, *r*, *n*, and in the Kandahar dialect *sh*. Retroflex consonants are made by curling the tongue backward; our English *r* is a retroflex.

Grammars

Both languages have a basic word order in which the direct object comes before the verb. They also have verb systems that resemble the English verb system in basic ways. Dari and Pashto verbs have two basic stems – present and past – and make a distinction between perfective and imperfective that has its echoes in the perfect tenses of English (*I went to the store* vs. *I have gone to the store*).

Dari nouns have no grammatical gender, but are marked for person and number (singular and plural). Verbs agree with the subject in person and number; there is an extensive pattern of compound verbs consisting of a noun or adjective plus an auxiliary verb, as is the case in Pashto. However, Pashto also has three separate types of verbs, each with its own set of irregular verbs. Pashto is also more complex than Dari in terms of word formation. It has several classes of masculine and feminine nouns and adjectives and complex sets of weak and strong pronouns.

Vocabulary

Dari and Pashto have many words in common, a result of both being Iranian languages and therefore having the same ancestral words and of having been spoken side by side for centuries.

Both languages have a number of words borrowed from Arabic, as do all the languages spoken by Islamic peoples. Many given names, especially men's, are Arabic. In the compound verb classes of both languages, many of the nouns that form the first part of the compound are Arabic. For example, the Pashto [harakat kaw-] 'make a move' is composed of the Arabic [harakat] 'movements', and [saber kaw-] 'bear with' from Arabic [saber] 'patience'.

As is true of all languages, the dialects of Dari and Pashto spoken in areas adjacent to other languages are likely to have more borrowed words from those languages. For example, Pashto has borrowed words from Urdu, spoken in Pakistan, and the Dari spoken in the north has borrowed words from Uzbek and Turkmen.

Writing Systems

Both languages are written in the Arabic alphabet, which reads from right to left and connects letters in cursive style. (Dari has four extra letters to represent sounds that don't occur in Arabic. Pashto has the four extra letters that Dari has, plus an additional eight.) Because the Arabic alphabet does not use symbols to represent vowels (except in the Koran), it is impossible to transliterate from Dari or Pashto to English letter by letter, and there are a number of ways to spell the vowels. In putting together this fact sheet, for example, the author encountered *mujahideen*, *mujaheddin*, *mujahedin*, and *mujahiddeen*.

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traditionally do not have last names.

Names

Afghans traditionally use only a first name. The Western notion of first name + surname is so ingrained that Afghan first names (which happen to be double names, similar to American double names such as Mary Jane or Billy Bob) are frequently interpreted as first name + surname. For example, the Western press frequently referred to Abdul Haq, the Pashtun leader who was executed by the Taliban in October 2001, as *Haq*, although his name was a common Arabic double name: *Abd* ('slave'), *-ul* (the Arabic definite article), *Haq* (one of the names for God).

For practical reasons, Afghans who have any contact with the Western world almost always adopt a surname or have one adopted for them. Having surnames is also considered a status symbol. Those from prosperous or influential families used surnames for added recognition, whereas commoners did not. Pashtuns frequently adopt the names of their tribes as their last names: A clue to this is a last name that ends in *-ai* (the animate masculine singular ending in Pashto) or *—i* (the animate masculine plural), as, for example, *Qalzai* (the last name of one of the Pashtun exile commanders). Women adopt, or are assumed to have, the last names of their husbands or fathers.

Afghan male first names are frequently Arabic names, reflecting Islamic values. Fore example, any male name starting with *Abd-ul-* is an Arabic construction with the last word being one of the names for God, as in *Abdul Haq*, mentioned above. Names ending in *-ullah* or *-allah* ('Allah') and *-din* ('religion'), are Arabic, as in, for example, *Habibullah*, *Atiqullah*, and *Jalaluddin*.

Afghan girls are usually given traditional Arabic or Persian feminine names such as *Laila*, *Nura*, *Jamila*, and *Nasrin*. Pashtuns frequently give their girls names that are Pashto words for things of beauty and value – for example, *Kawtara* ('pigeon'), and *Spogmay* ('moon'). top

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Education

There is no secular education system in Afghanistan.

Public education is a concept that arrived in Afghanistan very recently and never had a chance to take hold. It wasn't until 1969 that the government legislated free and compulsory education for children between the ages of 7 and 15, and the country had only 10 years to implement the legislation before the Soviet invasion. The actual provision of schools, teachers, and books lagged far behind the legislation. It is estimated that only one-third of school-age Afghan children ever attended school during the 1980s.

Before 1969, schools existed, but whether a child attended or not was completely up to the family. Some families thought it was important and took great efforts to get their children educated, including sending them away to relatives if local schooling wasn't available. Other families provided religious training for their sons (mostly rote memorization of the Koran in Arabic, taught by the local mullah). Still other families did not send their children to school at all.

It was possible to get a substantial education, however. There were secondary schools in urban areas and a university in Kabul, and a determined family with enough resources could provide their boys and girls with an extensive education. Since all education above the primary level was in Dari, all educated Afghans are fluent in that language, regardless of their ethnic group.

The Soviets were interested in building up the education system and extending education into the rural areas, but their efforts were soundly rejected. It was reported that in at least one area the Afghans responded to the establishment of Soviet-backed schools by killing the teachers, ostensibly because boys and girls were expected to sit in the same classroom. After the Soviets withdrew, what was left of the education system fell completely apart in the civil war. Kabul University closed, its faculty members dispersing to Pakistan, Iran, or the West. Children were either taught at home, in the local mosque, or not at all.

Under the Taliban, secular education did not exist. Boys received religious education, but girls were forbidden education altogether. Parents who wanted their children educated had to arrange for private tutoring in informal groups at home.

Although Afghans in the United States have a higher mean level of education than Southeast Asian and African refugee groups, many women

and elders have had little or no formal education. In Islam, however, education is more highly valued than wealth. The children of earlier refugees and immigrants are college educated or currently enrolled in higher education, and young adults are now entering the professional sector.

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Cross-Cultural and Adjustment Challenges

Afghans in the United States, like other newcomer groups, face a host of adjustment challenges in their new land. For newly arrived Afghans, the most pressing problems are the physical and psychological aftermath of war and economic hardship and the education of children who have had little or no previous education. The role of women is a particularly sensitive issue, and community-building poses challenges to a population fragmented by political, ethnic, and social differences. One bright spot in Afghan resettlement is the relative ease with which Afghans learn English.

How newly arrived refugees and immigrants adjust to their new communities depends to some extent on where they settle. For example, many of those who came to Northern Virginia in the 1980s tended to learn English and take available jobs faster than those in Northern California, who accessed the social welfare system. As with other groups, family sponsors also guide new arrivals into different paths – to education, for example, or to a particular occupation.

Afghans believe that health is maintained through regular exercise, fresh food, and a balanced diet.

Physical Health

The most common physical ailments of Afghan refugees coming to the United States from refugee camps in Pakistan are diarrhea, acute respiratory infection, and measles. Malnutrition is usually the root cause of these conditions, as it lowers resistance, especially in the case of children. Among Afghans in this country, health care and refugee service providers have observed various health problems, many of which relate to mental health. A study done in the early 1980s by the San Francisco General Hospital Refugee Clinic found typical new refugee conditions – dental caries (41%), dermatologic disorders (39%), intestinal parasites (36%), gastrointestinal disorders (23%), and musculoskeletal pain (joints, back, 12%). Those who have been in the United States longer, especially the middle-aged and elderly, have high rates of heart disease and mental health-related problems, particularly depression and such psychosomatic symptoms as headaches and joint and back pain.

The majority of Afghans do not trust the U.S. health care system, believing it to rely on technology rather than health professionals' skill in hands-on examination and diagnosis. Being told that "nothing is wrong" because of negative test results is upsetting when one feels sick.

Afghans believe that health is maintained through regular exercise, fresh food, and a balanced diet and by staying warm and getting enough rest. "Natural" illnesses can be prevented by following the precepts of Islam, which strongly emphasizes cleanliness and personal hygiene. Illness may be interpreted as the will of God and the result of not adhering to the principles of Islam or not maintaining proper balance of hot and cold in food or drink. For example, hot illnesses, such as fever or measles, are treated with cold foods and medicines. Home remedies include a variety of herbs and roots made into teas or poultices. Causes of "unnatural" illnesses include *nazar* (the evil eye) and *jinns* (ghosts or spirits). An unnatural illness must be treated with a curing ritual, such as prayers, Koranic verses, or eggs, because Western medicine is seen as useless in such cases.

Access to health care is blocked by a lack of health insurance and almost no culturally specific services. Language is a barrier, and very few hospitals or clinics employ trained interpreters. The most useful interventions would be to help people obtain health insurance and to hire and train bicultural and bilingual interpreters of both genders, women often being uncomfortable with a male health care provider or interpreter. There is an enormous need for health education in Pashto and Dari, not only in print form but also in other media, such as television, radio, and video, for those who cannot read. Afghans are responsive to and enthusiastic about health education.

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The need for mental health care is often considered shameful.

Mental Health

Psychological problems are especially challenging. Refugees have seen family members abducted or killed and watched as their homes were looted and destroyed. They have lived under the threat of death and spent long periods of time in hiding. Most have lived in refugee camps for more than 4 years.

Very few Afghan refugees received treatment for psychological problems in war-torn Afghanistan, where there has been virtually no psychological support. For a population of about 25 million, the reported number of psychiatrists is just 8 and the number of psychiatric nurses and psychologists is 18.

Not surprisingly, there is a high incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among Afghan refugees in the United States. Common PTSD symptoms include sleep disorders and nightmares, re-experiencing of the traumatic event, numbing or heightened responses to external stimuli, poor concentration, and persecution reactions. Depression, anxiety, and psychosomatic symptoms of stress are also common. Children suffer anxiety, grief, and nightmares and may experience bedwetting. However, there seems to be relatively little serious psychological disease such as schizophrenia or other psychotic disorders.

Attention should be given to Afghan refugee children and especially to

minor children in foster families. Experience has shown that among boys there is a great deal of frustration, anger, aggression, and resistance to rules, whereas girls tend to withdraw and fatalistically accept their situation, showing little willingness or ability to envision a bright future. The energy of these girls and boys should be channeled toward positive goals in programs that provide a support system to replace the community and family the children have lost. Placement preference should be given to families with an understanding of Afghan culture and Islam.

Many Afghans suffer physical symptoms of stress caused by culture conflict, family role change, isolation, financial and job problems, and loss of family, property, privacy, and social status. Common symptoms include back pain, other body aches, asthma or breathing problems, headaches, and stomach problems. An increase in mental problems among the educated elite is associated with a severe drop in social status.

For men, the sense that they have lost control over their lives and over their wives and children is a source of great stress. Alcohol abuse is not uncommon. Domestic abuse has been an issue all along, but until recently it was not acknowledged. Afghan Domestic Violence Prevention in Fremont, California is currently educating families on how to live together in peace and to accept each other as individuals.

Although it is agreed that mental health is a problem in the community, families seek psychiatric care only as a last resort, as the need for mental health care is often considered shameful. There is a fear that those seeking psychological treatment will be the source of gossip or that a therapist may share personal information about the family. Many would prefer a medication – a quick cure – to talk therapy.

Because most Afghans do not seek help for mental problems, the resettlement community may not think that they need psychological care. Yet the need clearly exists. As one Afghan noted, "We don't believe in psychiatry, although after 22 years of war, more than 50% of us have some mental health problems."

Despite the pressing need for mental health services for this population, culturally sensitive mental health services are not available. The Afghan Women Association International (AWAI) has developed effective women's support groups to reduce isolation and help women learn new coping methods. Group approaches with time for socializing are preferable to individual counseling. Other methods of stress reduction, such as physical activity (e.g., walking groups), are often effective in reducing depression. Self-help must be an important component, to build confidence, channel skills and energies in a constructive manner, and give a new and positive direction to lives that have been severely disrupted. top

It is important to assume that

Educational Concerns

Afghan refugee children are normal in terms of intelligence and ability to learn.

The U.S. educational system was not really designed for older children who cannot read or write and do not know how to learn in a classroom situation. Even those systems with well-developed English as a second language (ESL) or bilingual education programs have struggled when faced with students with little or no previous education. In the past decade, however, a small but growing number of school systems with increasing enrollments of these students have developed *newcomer* programs to address their academic, linguistic and cultural orientation needs. These programs offer a special educational program for students for a limited period of time (usually 9-18 months) before the students enter the regular ESL or bilingual education program. These newcomer programs help acclimate students to schooling in the United States, develop academic English skills, and teach some subject matter content. (see Bibliography).

It is crucially important to assume that Afghan refugee children are normal in terms of intelligence and their ability to learn. Many of them, in fact, will have become experienced in their struggle to survive. If there are signs of possible learning disabilities, however, the school system should use interpreters and assessments that are not dependent on language to determine a student's need for special services. It is also important to inform the school system if some of the children show evidence of PTSD.

If there are enough new Afghan refugee children in an area, special classes, roughly grouped by age, can be formed. The focus of these classes could be English, literacy, and classroom behavior together, with accelerated work in arithmetic and other subjects. If there aren't enough children to form classes, extensive tutoring is probably in order.

Young teenagers between 12 and 16 will be the most problematic group. Those who have missed many years of formal education will find it very difficult to acquire all the required credits for high school graduation, especially on a college preparatory track. Yet they are required by law to be in school. Some school systems have developed alternative high schools for these older learners that may prepare them for the world of work or provide instruction that could lead students into GED courses or adult basic education programs. Some states have also extended the age for which schooling would be provided free of charge.

Initially, Afghan adults will need assistance in learning enough oral English to get work and to function in the community. Then they will need to develop the necessary reading and writing skills to function in our literacy-based society. Special ESL programs exist, or can be set up, for students who cannot read in their native language. Such programs usually present the language orally, through activities, and teach literacy skills in a special, separate class. This kind of approach differs from that of ESL classes for learners who have literacy skills in the native language. In these classes, instruction uses the students' ability to read their native language to facilitate the development of reading and writing skills in English. top

Dari and Pashto have many grammatical elements that correspond to elements in English.

Learning English

In general, speakers of Dari and Pashto will have fewer problems learning English than the speakers of many other languages due to the distant relationship between English, Dari and Pashto.

Pronunciation

Neither Dari nor Pashto speakers will have much trouble with the pronunciation of English. Although they will speak with an "accent," their pronunciation of English will be quite easy to understand and will require no special pronunciation work. Speakers of both languages will have trouble with our *th* as in *thank* and *this*, and with the distinction between *w* and *v* as in *wine* and *vine*. Pashtuns will have trouble distinguishing *oy* and *ay* so that *lawyer* and *liar* come out the same, and they might have trouble with the difference between *f* and *p*. These are truly minor problems, however, and will not interfere significantly with communication.

Grammar

As Iranian languages that are distantly related to English, both Dari and Pashto have many grammatical elements that correspond to elements in English, for example, verb systems which make a distinction between past tenses (*I went to the store*) and perfect tenses (*I have gone to the store*).

There are some fundamental differences in structure. Dari and Pashto both put direct objects before the verb (*John Mary saw*), whereas in English we put direct objects after the verb (*John saw Mary*). Pashto has prepositions before, after, and both before and after the noun (*in the house*, *the house in*, *in the house in*) whereas English has prepositions before the noun only (*in the house*). Afghan refugees will learn the English structures as a matter of course in ESL classes or pick them up in interactions in English with Americans.

Vocabulary

English vocabulary will pose a problem. There are relatively few cognates between English and Dari/Pashto. (A cognate is a word used to mean the same thing in two languages, e.g., House/Haus in English and German.) Curiously, there are more English cognates in Pashto than there are in Dari. English is widely used in Pakistan, and the Pashto spoken there has adopted many English words, which have spread to the Pashto in Afghanistan.

Reading

Afghan refugees will have trouble developing English reading skills, even if they are readers of Dari or Pashto. First, they will have trouble with the new alphabet and irregular spelling system. Lack of vocabulary and the complexity of written English structures as compared with spoken structures will pose further problems.

Afghan refugees will have to learn at least to decode words, as a simple matter of survival in this country. Beyond that, the necessity for reading skills will vary widely from refugee to refugee and depend on reading level in Dari or Pashto, education level, and the refugee's goals in the United States.

Writing

Afghan refugees who are literate in Dari or Pashto will need special help in handwriting, as writers of Arabic alphabets universally have difficulty with the left-to-right, every-letter-on-the-line nature of handwriting in a Roman alphabet. Refugees who are not literate will have to learn some kind of signature, even if they never learn to write. Among nonliterate refugees, women, who have fine motor skills from embroidery and sewing, are often far more successful at developing handwriting than are men.

Names

Considering how computerized our society is, and how inflexible computers are with regard to misspellings and inconsistencies, the Afghan refugee unused to having a last name is courting bureaucratic disaster. One of the most valuable services to provide for a newly arrived refugee family is to establish with each one of the members first and last names, complete with the spelling noted on the I-94 refugee status document. When this is, it should be impressed on them how important it is to give this information consistently. If they speak little or no English, special cards can be developed for use if they become lost or if they need to give their names to someone.

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The topic of women's rights is a touchy one.

Women's Issues

Afghan women have been coming to the United States since the late 1970s. Thus, as a group they provide a striking picture of the transition from a very traditional, patriarchal, family- and home-centered society to a technologically oriented, individualistic, egalitarian society marked by social isolation and a focus on obtaining material goods.

In Afghanistan, marriages were often arranged, and women were generally less educated than men. They generally married young, had many babies (preferably boys), did not work outside the home, and were restricted to socializing mainly with female relatives. Until recently, however, urban educated women worked, and some chose their own husbands, although they were discouraged from socializing with unrelated men. Restrictions on women are recent, enforced by fundamentalist mujahideen groups and the Taliban. King Amanullah Khan (reign 1919-1929) stated, "Religion does not require women to veil their hands, feet and faces or enjoin any special type of veil. Tribal custom must not impose itself on the free will of the individual." Islam also promotes gender equality and respect between

husband and wife.

Afghan women in the United States experience some role confusion, and community opinions are divided over the proper role of women. More traditional men expect their wives to stay home and cook for the family, take care of the children, clean house, and socialize only with Afghan female friends. More cosmopolitan women enjoy their freedom and the opportunity to be active in the community. For all Afghan women, however, maintaining a good reputation is a lifelong demand. Once a woman's reputation is tarnished, she is no longer respected. Gossip, both positive and negative, is very common.

Women's issues differ strikingly by age and generation. Elderly women are often widows who live with an adult child and family. As they rarely speak English, they are essentially homebound, afraid of going out because they will get lost. Unable to take public transportation to visit friends or other family members, they badly miss the constant visiting that is characteristic of social life in Afghanistan.

Married women between the ages of 25 and 45 struggle to balance Afghan values and the demands of their life in the U.S. They must balance their husbands' expectations of traditional behavior with opportunities for independence, and the Afghan community's disapproval of Americanized behavior with some measure of support for their acculturating children. Many women work a double day. After long hours on the job, their husbands expect them to prepare traditional Afghan food (including hot lunches), conform to high standards of housekeeping, and attend to children's needs, even if the man is not working. Women whose husbands help in the home and allow them to go to meetings consider themselves fortunate.

Divorced women feel the disapproval of the community. Unmarried women of any age are called "girls" and usually continue to live with their parents; it is rare for them to live alone or with peers. In many cases, women who are not married by their early 20s are viewed as having something wrong with them and may be called *torshee* ('rotten,' 'expired'). Remaining single, however, is gradually, if begrudgingly, becoming slightly more acceptable.

While Afghan women are expected to marry, finding an appropriate mate is difficult for women who have acculturated to life in the United States. Women have pursued higher education at a much greater rate than men have, and they want husbands who are equally well educated and from families of equal or higher social status. Some men perceive acculturated women to be contaminated by American ideas and not properly submissive. Younger men are intimidated by educated women, and men who have been traditionally brought up expect their wives to be less educated than they are. Islam forbids women from marrying out of the faith, so very few Afghan women marry non-Afghans. They are caught in a no-woman's land.

Teens and young adults are expected to maintain modest behavior and chastity to avoid destroying the family's reputation; typical teen dress, speech and behavior are seen as improper, forward, and immoral. Afghan girls are often torn between their family's wishes and being like their American peers. There are three ways of dealing with this conflict: remaining a "good Afghan girl" who respects her parents' wishes; leading a double life, hiding American-style behavior or friends (especially American boyfriends) from family members; and open acculturation, possible only in flexible families willing to brave powerful and damaging gossip in the Afghan community.

The topic of women's rights is a touchy one, especially in the aftermath of the Taliban. The vast majority of Afghan women consider themselves as part of their husbands' or fathers' households. American service providers who urge Afghan refugee women to assert their rights are likely simply to confuse or frighten the women. Moreover, the men in the community will very likely take such urgings as an insult to their honor and will withdraw their cooperation.

The process of helping Afghan women become aware of their rights should be a gradual one. They should be made aware in a subtle way of the laws that protect women. For example, they should know that domestic violence is not to be considered a private issue and that there are places where they can report abuse. Many of those who are being resettled are single heads of household. The fact that they have taken the responsibility of caring for the family is a strong indication of their strength and resilience.

Afghan men should be involved in this initiative in support of women. Islam can be a useful tool in this regard, as it asserts the rights of women and extols the value of education. Women are often unaware of these principles, but once this reasoning is revealed, Afghan men can rarely argue.

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Community cooperation has increased in recent years.

Capacity- and Community-building

The tensions among the various Afghan groups are political, economic, sectarian and ethnic based. Tensions between Pashtuns and the Nothern minorities heightened after the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and continued, although for different reasons, with the Taliban's rise to power (see sidebar).

Ismailis have often asked to be resettled within their own community. Similarly, Shi'a Hazaras prefer to stay together. Both communities have separate worship centers and would not pray in Sunni mosques. They would treat the month of *Moharram* differently from the Sunnis.(Moharram is a month of grief that marks the martrydom of Imam Hussain, the grandson of Mohammed. The Shi'as give special importance to this month.)

Afghans who have been in the United States for up to two decades are very cautious in relating to newly arrived family members or friends because Afghans prefer to make their own judgements. Some newly arrived refugees may misinterpret advice, viewing it as criticism, so relatives tend to be careful not to offend the newcomers.

Children and young adults who have grown up in the United States often have friends of different ethnic backgrounds, although their primary social group may be Afghan. There is one Afghan gang in Fremont, California called *Liwani*, made up of 16- to 21-year-olds. However, the gang was formed not for purposes of crime but to defend the Afghan code of honor, particularly the honor of Afghan girls when they are approached by non-Afghan boys. The gang provides help and support to young Afghans making their way in a new and unfamiliar land.

In the past, social service providers perceived Afghans as uninterested in cohesive community action. Until the early 1990s, community organization was difficult because of ideological differences related to the jihad in Afghanistan. Despite these continuing differences, Afghans supported the Afghan Fund to build mosques in New York, Virginia, and California. Community cooperation has increased in the most active Afghan community, the San Francisco Bay Area, largely because of the pioneering efforts of the Afghan Women Association International (AWAI). To address the wider needs of the Afghan community, AWAI founded the Afghan Coalition, which consists of AWAI, the Society of Afghan Professionals, the Afghan Soccer League, and Afghan Domestic Violence Prevention project. Similar Afghan women's organizations have started in San Diego, California, Washington, D.C., and Atlanta, Georgia. top

After September 11

An overwhelming majority of Afghans in the United States are pleased the Taliban has been ousted.

Before the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, Afghan communities in the United States were bitterly divided by loyalty to one of the seven Mujahideen parties. Later, tensions continued among Royalists, Fundamentalists, and Moderates, and social class differences began to assume more importance. Five years of Taliban repression exacerbated ethnic tensions, although Pashtuns who supported the Taliban regime did not adhere to its strict rules of behavior. Today, in 2002, an overwhelming majority of Afghans in the United States are pleased that the Taliban have been ousted. The small minority who support the Taliban do so for reasons of language and ethnicity and do not support terrorist acts. Afghans in the United States are excited about the coalition government.

The aftermath of the events of September 11 has been bittersweet, however. Afghans were shocked by the terrorist attacks and felt that both their faith and their homeland had been hijacked. They are shocked to be seen as terrorists and are upset that mainstream Americans don't know anything about Islam or remember that Afghans spent 10 years fighting the Soviet invasion. Before the events of September 11, some Afghans did not divulge

their identity because they did not want to be associated with the Taliban. But they now realize that hiding their identity helps no one, and most now openly state that they are Afghan and Muslim. The attack has stimulated activism among leaders to an unprecedented degree. Afghan Americans have testified in Congress and spoken at universities and church groups to present a more accurate picture of Islam and to distance mainstream Islam from the extremists who perpetrated the September 11 violence.

Many young educated people plan on going to Afghanistan to help rebuild the country. They are politically aware and want to take part in the decisions that will be made in Afghanistan. These young bilingual and bicultural Afghans will form the core of a cadre of new professionals – and a bridge between Afghanistan and the United States. top

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Bibliography for Further Reading

Print Resources

Books

The Dupree and Michener books listed below are classics. There is no lack of books and articles on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and books on the Taliban are coming off the press every day. The others mentioned are the most respected of the very recent books on Afghanistan.

DuPree, Louis. **Afghanistan**. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973, 1978, 1980.

The most comprehensive source of information on Afghanistan up to the Soviet occupation. Very readable (Dupree had a sense of humor), it includes sections on geography, people, ancient history, and modern developments, with excellent photos, drawings, and charts. Now out of print, but used copies are available.

Michener, James A. **Caravans**. New York: Random House, 1963.

A wonderful adventure story that gives a vivid picture of the Afghanistan of the 1940s, including government efforts to modernize and life among the nomads.

Borovik, Artem. **The Hidden War: A Russian Journalist's Account of the Soviet War in Afghanistan**. New York: Grove Press, 2001.

Fascinating account of the Soviet war in Afghanistan, from the point of view of the Soviets. Borovik was a widely respected Russian journalist.

Frederiksen, Birthe. **Caravans and Trade in Afghanistan**. Copenhagen: Rhodos, 1995.

Goodson, Larry P. **Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban**. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2001.

A thoughtful discussion of the reasons behind Afghanistan's inability to form a centralized nation after the withdrawal of the Soviets. Includes an analysis of the effects of the civil war on the country's people and economy.

Olesen, Asta. **Afghan Craftsmen**. Copenhagen: Rhodos, 1994.

Pedersen, Gorm. **Afghan Nomads in Transition**. Copenhagen: Rhodos, 1994.

Rashid, Ahmed. **Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia**. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001.

A thorough, widely praised discussion of the Taliban, including the history of the Taliban movement, the Taliban interpretation of Islam, women and children in Taliban society, drugs and opium and the Taliban, bin Laden, and a discussion of the Taliban in the context of the need for oil pipelines across Afghanistan, a topic that has been somewhat overcome by events but is still fascinating.

Articles

The following articles address cultural and adjustment challenges concerning Afghan refugees in the United States. Most of Dr. Lipson's research focuses on the San Francisco Bay Area Afghan community, but her cultural insights are widely applicable. The last article addresses Pashtun culture in general.

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Mghir, R., and Raskin, A. (1999). **The psychological effects of the war in Afghanistan on young Afghan refugees from different ethnic backgrounds.** International Journal of Social Psychiatry 45(1): 29-36.

Omidian, P. and Lipson, J. (1992) **Elderly Afghan refugees: Tradition and transition in Northern California**. In Refugee Issues Papers, American Anthropological Association 1, 27-39.

Omidian, P. and Lipson, J. (1996). **Ethnic coalitions and public health: Delights and dilemmas with the Afghan Health Education Project in Northern California**. Human Organization 55(3): 355-360.

Younos, M. Farid (1998). **Parents' Reflections on Afghan Language Maintenance in the United States: A Participatory Research**. Doctoral dissertation, University of San Francisco.

Hilton, I., **The Pashtun Code**. The New Yorker, December 3, 2001, pp. 59-71. top

Online Resources

The Center for Afghanistan Studies at the University of Omaha at Nebraska serves as the only institutional base in the United States specifically and exclusively concerned with Afghanistan affairs. The Center conducts research, information exchange, and consultation activities and provides a focal point for the gathering together of notable Afghan specialists and significant source materials. The UNO Library has what many consider to be the finest collection of Afghan primary and secondary materials in North America.

The New York Times runs excellent stories on current events in Afghanistan and background pieces describing the geography and people of Afghanistan. For previous coverage, slide shows and timelines, go to http://www.nytimes.com/attacks. For a collection of interactive maps and diagrams, go to http://www.nytimes.com/graphics. Click on 'U.S. Response'

The Washington Post also has a superb set of graphics and maps of Afghanistan, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/graphics/ attack/index.html. Pull down the 'Hostile Region' menu.

The Afghan Network is an online gathering place for Afghans and a resource for non-Afghans on history and culture. Visit: http://www.afghan-network.net/.

Other Online Resources

Adams, R., & Burt, M. (2002). **Research on Reading Development of Adult English Learners: An Annotated Bibliography**. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. For a comprehensive review of the research that has been conducted on reading development among adult English language learners in the United States in the last 20 years go to: http://www.cal.org/ncle/readingbib/. Annotations detail the types of studies, target population characteristics, settings, findings, and implications for practice.

Newcomer programs help acclimate students to schooling in the United States, develop academic English skills, and teach some subject matter content. To use the searchable Web database of newcomer programs throughout the U.S., go to: www.cal.org/newcomerdb. top

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